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ABSTRACT

The author reports autobiographically and analyzes the components of a successful job search in mid-career. Practical suggestions are given which apply to "early career individual" as well as to "mid-career persons." The four ingredients of an effective job search strategy are: being organized, identifying personal skills, holding positive self-concepts and initiating contacts to fit each potential job situation. (SBP)

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"JOB SEARCH TECHNIQUES: EMPHASIS ON MID-CAREER CHANGE"

A presentation at the NAWDAC 60th Anniversary Conference in New Orleans, La., March 19, 1976

by

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Last year I conducted a vast job search in Los Angeles while holding a full time job as Director of Career Counseling at Babson College in Boston. I say vast because the distance, 3,000 miles, in itself presented no small challenge. It's quite one thing to look for a job in the city of your residence; it's quite another thing to look for a job in a city 3,000 miles away.

This job search was vast in another sense. Los Angeles is anything but a small city. There are lots of employers to reach. Besides, a thrust in my strategy was to apply for many jobs since my assessment of self told me I was versatile enough to qualify for many positions.

The job search lasted for four months and culminated in my getting a position that I felt would utilize many of my talents and skills and at the same time present a sufficient challenge to me.

It didn't take me long after I successfully completed this job search to realize that I should share the knowledge and experience I had gained through the process. So I wrote an article about it.[1] It was published in the Fall issue of NAWDAC Journal and followed by a sequel article in the Spring issue.[2] On the strength of this written sharing of my experience I was asked to address this group today here in New Orleans. My topic was logically to be: "Job Search Techniques: Emphasis on Mid-Career Change." The mid-career emphasis was included because I am in mid-career; therefore, my job search strategy was made from mid-career vantage point. In addition, the Conference Program Committee realized that there are a great many mid-career people looking for jobs or contemplating career change in their mid years.

As I look at my audience, however, I see many faces too young to belong to mid-career persons. They belong to early-career individuals. If you early-career individuals are here not only because you want to pick up some ideas that will help you in your counseling but also because you are interested in helping yourself, then your presence confirms what you and I know so well: that the market is tight, jobs are hard to come by, and the way to get a job today is to combine the right ingredients in an effective job search strategy. It is four of these ingredients that I would like to address and hopefully in the process speak to all of you regardless of where you might be in your career or what level of person you may be helping in the future.

I would like to begin by addressing the issue of self assessment and skills identification which to my mind is the most important ingredient in any organized job search.

Note, that I say organized job search. Most of us must go the route of organizing job search. Few of us get beyond first base without a plan. True, there are those fortuitous circumstances that bring by sheer happenstance and what we might call "fate" the ideal job or if not ideal at least some kind of job. In fact, most of the time we get jobs because we are "in the right place at the right time," a fact that suggests pure chance, fate, or as some would have it "divine providence." As job hunters, however, it behooves us to get organized and plan our strategies as if there were no chance involved. Katherine Nash in her consultation with job searchers poignantly states, "chance favors the organized mind."[3]

Let me return to the notion of self assessment as the first step of an organized job search campaign. Why self assessment?

Richard Bolles, author of the best seller What Color is Your Parachute?,[4] suggests that the thread that weaves a career together is the string of skills we accumulate through education, work, and play. SKILLS are like armor and tools with which we face the world of work and function in it. Skills are what give us an entree into that world, protect us in the arena, and establish our status there.

What kind of skills should we assess? All of them, regardless of where we got them, how we got them, why we got them. We need to acquire a full picture of our strengths and our assets, and the only way to get this comprehensive picture is thoroughly to assess our skills.

There is a current theory I once heard Richard Bolles speak of as appropriate evidence for the necessity to self assess thoroughly.[5] It is a theory propounded by Robert Ornstein. In it is embodied the notion that we really possess "two brains", "we perform right and left thinking"; we gain different kinds of skills from our "two brains."[6]

(See page 7, handout, Robert Ornstein's "Right and Left Thinking.")

The left side of our brain is the "seat of the faculty of expression"; it is the side involved in analytic, logical thinking. Our talents of analysis, logic, verbal and mathematical expression come from this side.

Incidentally, our culture has traditionally established this left side of the brain as the major side and the right side, the minor side. Ornstein would suggest that this is an erroneous distinction to make. There is no major or minor; both are major.

It is not difficult for us to assess the talents that come from the left side of our brain. Our schools tell us quite forcefully how we stand in these talents. In fact we get tested to death in the math and verbal areas before we reach high school.

What about the right side of the brain? What talents come from it? How do we assess them?

It is the right side of the brain that is primarily responsible for our orientation in space. Our artistic talents, talents of imagination, perspective, and intuition, come from this side of the brain. In contrast to the linear integration of material that the left side of the brain performs, the right side processes information more diffusely and integrates material simultaneoulsy which sounds a great deal, does it not, like the intuitional process?

The talents that come out of the right side of the brain are important talents which perhaps our culture has underplayed. An occupation, incidentally, could rise or fall on the strength of them.[7] The right side of the brain has been considered "minor." Great stress has been put on verbal and intellectual skills that come from it as the "major" side. And while our schools have not developed sophisticated instruments to measure the talents that come from the right side of the brain to the same degree that they have researched and devised instruments to measure left-brain talents of analysis and logic, the measurement and assessment of these right-brain talents are essential for self knowledge.[8]

Where do we logically go from here? Bolles suggests devising assessment instruments of both left- and right-brain talents. Perhaps the most sophisticated instrument he suggests is writing an autobiography.[9] In the autobiography a person examines thoroughly his/her life's accomplishments. He/she recounts them in simple, concrete, comprehensive, detailed form. From this autobiography can be factored out the skills and talents accumulated over the years.

Henry Pearson[10] and Gladys Bishop,[11] collaborators in the Personnel Division at Polaroid, Boston, for several years, suggest a device for self-assessment that includes listing achievements from one's past life, factoring them to identify patterns of skills. My version of this approach appears in detailed form in the sequel article I referred to earlier.[12] It includes a step by step account of how to compile a skills resume. I will not spell out the process here. I wish only to emphasize the necessity of using such an instrument or one as effective in order to self assess and identify skills. If you don't know your skills, talents, and abilities, you open yourself to all sorts of rejection from employers who do not make it their job to assess your strengths. That homework is yours to be done far in advance and as thoroughly as possible before you even begin to mail a letter, place a phone call, canvas the area you see as your target for getting a job.

So far I have addressed two of the several ingredients of job search strategy I plan to cover here: getting organized and thoroughly identifying skills. The entire process should have an underlying quality of organization to it. Identifying skills is a part of getting organized and it is probably the single most important facet of job search. We cannot search if we do not know what we are searching for. We can determine in large part what we will look for by determining what we are capable of doing. Our skills will tell us this.

An adjunct effect of self assessment and skills identification is thinking positive, a third ingredient of job search strategy. We need to think highly of ourselves if we are going to be marketable today. We will more than likely think highly of ourselves if we thoroughly examine our assets. The process of writing down achievements, describing them, and finally factoring them for talents and skills will tune us into our value, our worth. If we do the exercise with seriousness, we end up being pleasantly surprised at how many things we have done and how well we have done them. This knowledge in turn nurtures a positive self concept and helps us to think positive.

With a thorough grasp of our skills and with a positive self concept, we begin to approach the employer arena in an organized fashion.

Let me here suggest a fourth ingredient of effective strategy; namely, thinking big and approaching many employers in a warm, individual manner.

Write to, telephone, reach by some method or other a vast number of employers. Do not make your target small or your parameters narrow. The more employers you tap, the more likely it is that "chance will favor you."

A perennial mistake job hunters make is to "put all their eggs in one basket." They get a lead, take an interview, get some notion that they are being considered seriously for a position, and then they just "sit on that basket of eggs." After a considerable time has elapsed and none has hatched, they became dejected, downcast. They find they have lost a great deal of time "just sitting;" whereas, if they had put eggs in many baskets, sat on them all but none solely, chances are one egg in one of the baskets would have hatched. The point here is: never wait, never pause; keep making contacts, continue reaching new employers. You are thinking, I am sure, This requires incredible energy, and you are right. But you might as well face it head on. If you do not wish to expend energy, then you might as well not count on getting a job of your choice...unless of course chance graces you without your effort (and, we all know cases in which that has happened).

Finally, write warm, personal, yet professional, coherent, sophisticated letters. If you are using the telephone let the same style guide you. Do not be afraid to let your personality come through the letters or over the phone. In your mail campaign, each letter you write should be distinct from any other letter to an employer. It should be unique. You do not speak exactly the same way to any two people unless you have rehearsed a speech (which incidentally will turn off listeners), so you should write a special letter to each employer. Again this requires incredible energy as well as creativity.

In summary, then, four ingredients of an effective job search strategy are:

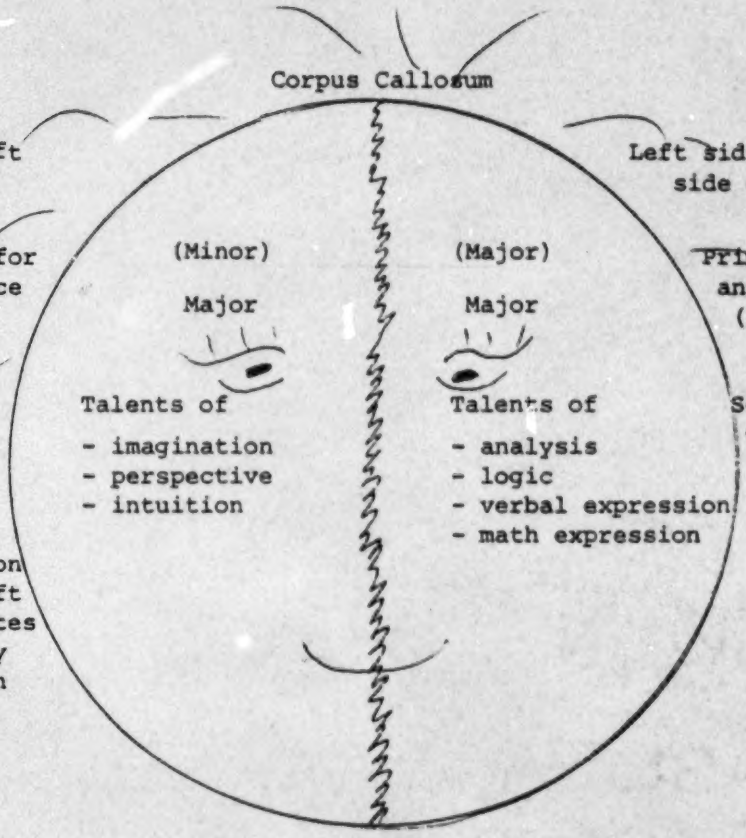
* Being organized
* Identifying skills
* Thinking positive

* Thinking big and appealing to many employers with a warm, personal, yet professional approach tailored to each circumstance.

The marvelous result of all of this is that you will probably accomplish your feat. You will feel that you have done what some people think in impossible today; namely, finding a job.

Robert Ornstein's

"Right and Left Thinking"



2 Hemispheres in the Cerebral Cortex

The right and left side of the brain yield valuable skills. Our educational system measures well the left side. What about the right?

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